DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 163 561 95 EA 010 665

AUTHOR	Mazzarella, Jo Ann
TITLE	Improving Self-Image of Students. ACSA School Management Digest, Series 1, Number 14. ERIC/CEM Research Analysis Series, Number 41.
INSTITUTION	Association of California School Administrators.; Oregon Univ., Eugene. ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	78
CONTRACT	400-78-0007
NOTE	47p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Association of California School Administrators, 1575 Old Bayshore Highway, Burlingame, California 94010 ($2.75 nonmembers; $1.75 for ACSA members)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Bilingual Students; Delinquency Prevention; Delinquents; Disadvantaged Youth; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; *Literature Reviews; *Personal Growth; Potential Dropouts; *Program Descriptions; Self Actualization; *Self Concept; Self Concept Tests; *Students; Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Research over the last ten years provides overwhelming evidence that the most successful students have strong positive self-concepts. This booklet reviews literature on self-concept and describes many programs designed to improve student self-esteem. The paper begins by noting that although no one understands the order of the cause and effect relationship, there is a strong correlation between self-concept and achievement. Then ways to improve self-concept are discussed, with a warning that techniques for measuring self-concept have problems. Methods for improving self-concept include classroom techniques, counseling and discussion groups, and teacher inservice programs. One chapter is devoted to programs for dropouts, delinquents, and the disadvantaged. A final chapter documents the effects of teacher attitudes and beliefs and suggests ways to improve teacher self-concept. The overall conclusion is that one reason for the success of self-concept improvement programs may be that positive teacher attitudes about student abilities have strong effects on student self-concept and student academic achievement. (JM)

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ED163561

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT DIGEST

Series 1, No. 14

Improving self-image of Students

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EA 010 665

Improving self-image of Students

Jo Ann Mazzarella

Prepared by
ERIC Clearinghouse on
Educational Management

Published by
Association of California
School Administrators

ACSA School Management Digest, Number Fourteen
ERIC/CEM Accession Number: EA 010 665
ERIC/CEM Research Analysis Series, Number Forty-One

Printed in the United States of America, 1978
Association of California School Administrators
1575 Old Bayshore Highway
Burlingame, California 94010

Additional copies are available from ACSA for $1.75, members; $2.75, nonmembers.

The material in this publication was prepared pursuant to a contract with the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Prior to publication, the manuscript was submitted to the Association of California School Administrators for critical review and determination of professional competence. This publication has met such standards. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of either the Association of California School Administrators or the National Institute of Education.

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FOREWORD

Both the Association of California School Administrators and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management are pleased to cooperate in producing the *School Management Digest*, a series of reports designed to offer educational leaders essential information on a wide range of critical concerns in education.

At a time when decisions in education must be made on the basis of increasingly complex information, the *Digest* provides school administrators with concise, readable analyses of the most important trends in schools today, as well as points up the practical implications of major research findings.

By special cooperative arrangement, the series draws on the extensive research facilities and expertise of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. The titles in the series were planned and developed cooperatively by both organizations. Utilizing the resources of the ERIC network, the Clearinghouse is responsible for researching the topics and preparing the copy for publication by ACSA.

The author of this report, Jo Ann Mazzarella, was commissioned by the Clearinghouse as a research analyst and writer.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-concept? In 1955, if you had asked the average school principal about student self-concept, you probably would have gotten a blank look. Up until the early sixties, few educators were concerned about student self-concept. How pupils saw themselves was considered to be something for psychologists and counselors to worry about, not teachers and administrators. Self-image or self-esteem was thought to be chiefly a product of home life, not of school life, and improving self-concept was not considered a part of the school curriculum.

Then things began to change. First, psychologists and educators began to discover striking correlations between student self-concept and success in school. Over and over again researchers found evidence that students with good opinions of themselves achieved more than students who had low self-esteem. School people began to wonder if learning more about self-concept would help them to get through to students whom they could not reach before, especially minorities and the disadvantaged.

Studies of very young children suggested that children came to school with self-concepts that affected their achievement. Educators then began to wonder how much effect they had on these self-concepts and if they could make children feel better about themselves and their ability to achieve. Researchers found that not only was self-concept related to achievement, but both of these were strongly correlated with teachers' beliefs about students' abilities and even with teachers' beliefs about their own abilities.

In addition, the sixties heralded a new interest in the emotional life as well as the intellectual life of the student. Some educators, especially those calling themselves humanists, began to focus their efforts on promoting student growth in areas not strictly academic. They began to be concerned about the mental health of students and realized that a posi-

tive self-concept was an important component of student well-being.

What is self-concept? The definition to be used in these pages is similar to that used by Quandt: *Self-concept* refers to all the perceptions that an individual has of himself or herself with a special emphasis on the individual's perceptions of his or her own value and ability. Although self-value or self-esteem is strictly speaking only one component of self-concept, it is the component of most interest to school people. In fact, most educators are not as interested in students' overall self-esteem as in their self-esteem as learners—how students regard their own ability to learn.

In this report a *high self-concept* refers to a feeling of competence or capability. A teacher or administrator who is concerned with fostering high self-concepts is not attempting to create a school full of self-important egotists. A high or positive self-concept, as used here, is similar to what Jersild, in his pioneering work on self-concept, called "self-acceptance." As he puts it, "Self-acceptance is not the same as smugness, or conceit, or the illusion of being perfect. Indeed, the self-accepting person makes no pretense to being perfect. He accepts his limitations and does the best he can with his resources."

What is of greatest concern to teachers and administrators is whether students believe they can change and grow and learn. Research indicates that if students are to achieve, they must first see themselves as achievers. Improving self-concept means helping students to have faith in their own abilities.

The pages that follow include a number of programs used successfully in schools to raise student self-concept. These programs are not intended to be a representative sample, but are instead a carefully selected sample of the best programs. Almost all programs for which measurable results were available produced significant gains in student self-concept, and many produced significant gains in achievement too. A few for which no data were collected have been included here because they seem unusually promising.

How are gains in self-concept measured? Most instruments to measure self-concept are based on self-reports. Respondents are asked to classify themselves in many different areas, usually on a paper and pencil test. For instance, older students might be asked to check "always, often, sometimes, seldom, or never" for a number of different statements such as "I learn things more quickly than other students" or "I have lots of friends" or "My work is neat." Teachers read similar statements aloud to younger students who might circle a smiling face or a frowning face to indicate yes or no.

These tests are subject to all the lack of objectivity and reliability inherent in any self-report measure. This fact must be remembered when evaluating the effects of programs.

Furthermore, it is difficult to tell how much the result of such programs depends on the Hawthorne or placebo effect. Like the sugar pills that the doctor assures us will cure the disease, programs to improve self-concept may depend as much on expectations for success as they do on the specific technique.

Yet in spite of these inherent problems, programs to improve self-concept appear to have real results. Whether they do so because of specific methods or because of teacher attitude or because of something else is impossible to tell. It seems probable that, like a sympathetic, reassuring doctor, a sympathetic, supportive teacher can accomplish wonders regardless of particular methods used. If these programs do no more than help teachers to focus their attentions on supporting students, caring about them as individuals, and really believing in their capabilities, then they are successful.

How can administrators improve students' self-concepts? The task for administrators will be to educate teachers about the importance of students' self-concepts. Administrators will need to encourage teachers to try programs in their own classrooms and to help them examine their attitudes toward students and develop supportive attitudes. In addition they will need to encourage and support teachers and to help them examine their attitudes toward themselves as teachers. The goal must be to improve teachers' self-concepts in the same

way that teachers improve students' self-concepts, so that both teachers and students come to believe that real intellectual and emotional growth is possible for everyone.

SELF-CONCEPT AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

One of the most important reasons teachers and administrators are interested in student self-concept is the irrefutable evidence of its link to achievement. Purkey, in 1970 in what is probably the definitive work on self-concept and achievement, made an exhaustive examination of the self-concept research done since 1960 and concluded: "Over-all, the research evidence clearly shows a persistent and significant relationship between the self concept and academic achievement."

Furthermore, Purkey agreed with researchers who believed there was a stronger correlation between achievement and self-concept than between achievement and ability. Purkey felt that not only research but the experience and intuition of teachers bore out this belief:

> For generations, wise teachers have sensed the significant and positive relationship between a student's concept of himself and his performance in school. They believed that the students who feel good about themselves and their abilities are the ones who are most likely to succeed.

Henning noted that an Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) project that concentrated solely on improving achievement also produced significant gains in self-concept as shown by the Self-Appraisal Inventory (SAI). A report by IBEX and Roy Littlejohn Associates revealed that a Washington (D.C.) Title I program that attempted to raise math and reading scores also showed a significant rise in student self-concept as measured by the Self Observation Scales (SOS). No programs, however, attempt to do the opposite, that is, raise achievement scores by merely improving self-concept; it is probably unreasonable to expect achievement gains to follow immediately and directly from a rise in self-concept.

Researchers have also found that students who lack self-esteem or have a poor opinion of themselves seem to do poorly in school. The IBEX-Littlejohn report mentioned

above found evidence that those students whose academic deficiencies indicated that they were most in need of a Title I compensatory education program had a low self-concept.

Which Comes First?

Although most researchers and educators agree that there is a clear and strong correlation between self-concept and achievement, no one knows which causes the other or whether, indeed, they are both caused by something else. Do students do well because they think well of themselves or think well of themselves because they do well? On the one hand, Coleman and others, in their classic report on educational opportunity, maintained that the relation of a student's self-concept to achievement is "from one perspective, merely the accuracy of his estimate of his scholastic skills, and is probably more a consequence than a cause of scholastic achievement."

On the other hand, Pardew and Schilson reported that Combs and Soper had found evidence that self-concept may actually precede achievement in school. Combs and Soper found that kindergarteners' self-concepts (presumably formed before they had much opportunity to experience academic success or failure) were strongly predictive of their academic achievement in both first and sixth grades. Purkey cites research by Lamy that revealed a similar correlation for kindergarteners.

Nevertheless, Purkey himself believed that the evidence was inconclusive.

> The basic question of whether children see themselves negatively because of their poor school performance, or whether they perform poorly in school because they see themselves negatively is unresolved.

Purkey postulated a continuous interaction between self-concept and achievement, a theory that apparently underlies most of the programs and research surveyed in these pages. Many programs described here avoided wrestling with the chicken-or-the-egg problem of achievement and self-concept by endeavoring to improve both simultaneously. This is probably the technique that promises the best chance of posi-

tive results, but it is disappointing from a researcher's viewpoint because of the inability to isolate the effects of each method. Many other programs merely aim at improving self-concept without measuring achievement gains at all.

For many educators, a concern with helping students evaluate themselves and their potentials more highly is based solely on a desire to improve their academic achievement. For others, who define education and the role they play as educators more broadly, this concern is seen as an end in itself, as an important component of a child's psychological growth. As Franks and Dillon put it:

> In sum, self-esteem is relevant not only because it is an unseparable *part* of academic performance . . . but because of its empirical association with a broad range of abilities that relate to the child's state of mental health, i.e., as a whole psyche.

Importance of Positive Feedback

Franks and Dillon note that there are two sources for a child's self-esteem: the feedback a child gets from observing the effects of his or her own actions and the feedback the child gets from significant others. The first kind of feedback comes merely from acting in the world. When little Johnny is finally able to stack his blocks successfully, he begins to see himself as a good block stacker and this view of himself becomes one of the components of his self-concept. The second kind of feedback comes when mother or father tells Johnny what a good block stacker he is and he incorporates this evaluation as part of his own self-evaluation.

Many authorities contend that the feedback people get from others has stronger effects on self-esteem than the feedback that comes from merely acting in the world. Teachers and administrators communicate this sort of feedback to students through grades, test scores, and tracking.

Persell, among others, believes that testing and tracking often destroy the self-esteem of students of low socioeconomic status and ultimately lower their academic achievement. She observes that IQ testing (often culturally biased or

based more on previous learning opportunities than on ability) often channels disadvantaged students into tracks for those with low ability. She then notes that most studies reveal that being placed in a low group lowers self-concept. She contends that this is at least partially because teachers have low expectations of students in low ability groups. In this way ability groupings perpetuate a vicious cycle. When teachers treat students as if they had low ability, the students begin to see themselves as incompetent, a view that in turn affects their performance.

Quandt agrees that ability grouping may have negative effects on self-concept but believes that, especially when it is used within a classroom in a subject like reading, these effects can be combatted by teacher attitude. He feels that ability groups won't harm self-concept if the teacher avoids comparison and competition among groups and accepts members of both groups equally. He recommends that groups not be designated as "lower"or "higher" and that teachers never speak of moving a student "up" or "down" to another group.

Quandt recommends the elimination of grading altogether, and many other authorities follow suit. As valuable as grading may be for feedback on a child's progress, many believe that the price paid in destruction of self-esteem is too high. Pupils who constantly receive low grades begin to define themselves as failures; their "F"s, instead of prodding them to try harder, convince them they are failures who cannot succeed no matter how hard they try. As Kash, Borich, and Fenton so aptly phrase it, "The ever-present bell-shaped curve of normal distribution has for some pupils the peal of constant victory and for other pupils the constant tolling of doom and failure."

Jersild, in his early work on self-concept, expressed his belief that schools' emphasis on competition for grades or athletic performance is harmful for those who succeed as well as those who fail. He claimed that such competition instills a sense of self worth that is superficial and false. Competition, he stated, may "lure children into the false position of testing their worth by their ability to get a slightly higher grade or to carry the ball an extra couple of yards down the field."

Whether testing, grading, and tracking ought to be abolished entirely will long be matters for debate. No one will deny the value of some method to give students feedback when they have mastered skills or concepts. Few deny the worth of the sort of "tracking" that allows students to work at their own levels of achievement. Yet this kind of grading or tracking emphasizes what students know or can do rather than what they do not know or cannot do. At any rate, it seems likely that emphasis on student failures will lower student self-concepts and thus breed further failures.

WAYS TO IMPROVE SELF-CONCEPT

Although home experiences have a profound effect on the self-concepts children bring with them to school, school experiences are also extremely significant in the development of student self-esteem. Darrigrand and Gum report on Trickett's research, which indicates that changes in self-concept are possible as late as age ten. As Kash, Borich, and Fenton explain,

> Regardless of the state of self-esteem with which each pupil enters the school system, it is possible for the teacher as a significant or salient other and for the environment of the school to provide psychological experiences from which the pupil can derive a sense of positive self-esteem.

A number of successful programs have been used by educators to improve student self-concept. Although there is some overlap, these can be roughly divided into

- teaching techniques or techniques focused on academic subject matter
- discussion group or counseling techniques
- inservice programs for teachers

Measurement

Before describing these programs, we must give some attention to the first and last step in any program for improving student self-concept: measurement of self-concept. This measurement usually takes the form of self-report by students or observation by teachers.

There are almost as many tests for measuring self-concept as there are programs to raise it. The twenty-eight programs surveyed for this report actually used twenty-eight different measures of self-concept, though some duplication was caused by a number of programs using several different tests. Although the proliferation of instruments admittedly makes direct comparison of program outcomes difficult, the situa-

tion is not so absurd as it sounds since the instruments are similar.

Some of the self-report tests mentioned most often include the

- Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory
- Self Appraisal Inventory
- Tennessee Self Concept Scale
- How-I-See-Myself Scale

Teachers or administrators wishing to see how their students score on measures of self-concept might begin with one of these.

Observation instruments are less formalized than self-report measures and often consist of nothing more than homemade questionnaires filled out by teachers about their students' self-concepts.

There are definite problems with both measures of self-concept. Kash, Borich, and Fenton have noted that "the most obvious constraint is our primitive state of knowledge as to what to measure, when to measure, and how to measure in order to obtain evidence of change in a pupil's psychological constructs of self."

Quandt explains that self-concept is a construct, not a behavior, and produces no pattern of behaviors consistent across all individuals. Yet tests can only assess behaviors. It is unknown whether the actual behavior being assessed is self-concept or merely the way students answer questions on tests.

Purkey explains that most studies on self-concept prove to be in fact studies of the *self-report* of self-concept. He sums up Combs's insights on this problem:

> The difference, in Combs's words, is that the self concept is "what an individual *believes* he is. The self report, on the other hand, is what the subject is ready, willing, able or can be tricked to say he is. Clearly, these concepts are by no means the same."

Observations by teachers avoid some of the problems of the student self-report but have problems of their own. One is that teachers (especially those trying to improve the self-

concept of students) lack objectivity about their students' self-concept.

As Purkey put it, current measures of self-concept "must be taken with a great deal of salt." Yet he himself did accept and use them, as do other researchers. Why? To say that measures of self-concept are accepted and used because they are all that is available is not very reassuring, but it is near the truth.

Purkey did note, however, that psychologists like Carl Rogers accept the self-report as a valuable source of information about the individual. Purkey maintains that the self-report's value depends on the subject's

- clarity of awareness
- command of adequate symbols for expression
- perceptions of social expectancy
- cooperation
- freedom from threat

Finally, lack of certainty about the value of self-report or teacher-observation measures does not necessarily mean that these tests are worthless or that programs to improve self-concept produce no effects. It means merely that no one really knows exactly what the tests measure and that no one has any hard or objective data (aside from achievement scores) about the effects of programs.

Most important, improving students' self-concepts is so necessary, both as an attempt to foster achievement and as a component of overall student mental health, that it would be tragic to abandon efforts to raise self-concept merely because self-concept gains cannot be measured objectively.

In assessing the results of future programs, one answer may be to follow Quandt's suggestion that the best measure may be observations of students by outside observers trained to assess behaviors such as

- self-talk (things one says about oneself)
- interest levels

- interactions (and lack of them) with others
- evidence of peer evaluations

For the present, perhaps, teachers and administrators can only experiment with programs and techniques in the hope that the effects that are now apparent will someday prove to be real.

Classroom Techniques

A publication issued by the Colorado Springs Public Schools reports on their PARADE Project, aimed at improving achievement in reading and raising student self-concept. An acronym standing for Projects Advancing Reading and Developing Ego-Strength, PARADE focused on students of all grade levels who scored low in reading and self-concepts on the PARADE Learner Self Concept Inventory, an instrument devised specifically for the program. Elementary students in the program attended regular classes for most of the day but, depending on test scores, participated in some or all of the following activities:

- ungraded grouping for instruction in specific reading skills
- reading lab
- assignment to self-concept group sessions

Secondary students were assigned to some or all of the following:

- courses in which they would be likely to succeed
- reading lab
- vocational work study
- group or individual counseling

The program emphasized individualized instruction of reading skills and provided an opportunity for some success for each student every day. The self-concept group and counseling sessions included field trips, role playing, and discussion techniques centering on self-concept.

After two semesters' work, 60 percent of students received reading scores that allowed them to return to the regular program while 88 percent showed significant gains on the PARADE Learner Self Concept Inventory. Cost of the program for 1972-73 was about $88,000 or $33.75 per pupil per month.

In another type of study, Franks and Dillon examined the effect of the "open" classroom on student self-concept. The authors looked at five open parochial schools that emphasized

- individualized instruction geared to student interest
- teacher-student negotiated contracts
- learning based on activity rather than on reading and listening

They compared the five open schools with two traditional parochial schools. Although all the schools had achievement scores that were comparable, self-concept was significantly higher in the open schools. Franks and Dillon believe that part of the reason students in the open schools scored higher in self-concept was that the schools gave students the opportunity to choose from many kinds of activities in which they felt successful. The authors also feel that providing the proper balance between student freedom and external structure was important.

Coopersmith and Silverman have offered several suggestions helpful to the teacher or administrator who wants to improve students' self-concepts. Although not backed by data, these techniques are valuable because they are based on Coopersmith's extensive research on parental influence on self-concept. To formulate the suggestions, Coopersmith and Silverman applied the principles gleaned from Coopersmith's research to the classroom. The authors recommend that teachers attempt to

- set up realistic class standards that are clear and definite
- praise and support each child
- give criticism that offers constructive alternatives

- challenge each child so that success does not come too easily

The last suggestion serves as a reminder that nourishing student self-concept involves more than just simple praise and support. To have high self-esteem, students need to feel they have accomplished something difficult and have mastered skills and concepts they didn't know before. Of course, finding the fine line between challenging students with something difficult and overwhelming them is not always easy.

Ralston and Thomas, physical education (P.E.) teachers concerned about fostering a positive physical self-concept, have formulated techniques for improving self-concept in P.E. that are applicable to other areas also. They suggest, among other things, some grading techniques that will improve students' self-concepts in P.E.:

- evaluating each student at the beginning of the year and deciding with the student how far he or she will progress
- breaking up skills into component parts and giving credit for successful execution of each part
- spreading out grading unobtrusively among other activities
- grading students by having them perform privately while only the teacher is watching

A study by Schwartz indicated that play production experiences can enhance the self-concept of students. Using the Acceptance of Self and Others Scale, Schwartz found significant changes in self-concepts for 144 students after participating in play production activities. For controls, she tested seventy-eight students participating in debate and speech activities and eighty students who were not participating in any activity. The self-concepts of both controls changed significantly less than those of these participants in the play production.

Schwartz hypothesized the reasons for the effects this way:

> The interactions and reward structure of the experiences provided opportunities for students to enhance their self-

esteem and their opinions of other people. Peer approval and acceptance, commendations from the director, and positive responses from the audience accompanied the rehearsals and public performance of the play. Security and status resulted from membership in the play production group to those students who worked cooperatively with others and diligently performed complex tasks.

Principal Ted Gary reported to the writer his feelings about a "pride program" that goes beyond the classroom to include his whole school (the Hazel Valley Elementary School in Seattle) and even the community. In this program, parents, teachers, and students all have worked together to formulate and carry out projects designed to make students proud of their school and of themselves. For instance, all four hundred students in the school contributed to the construction of a ceramic mural to beautify the halls.

Although Gary reports no real data about self-concept gain have arisen from this program, he and most of the teachers believe it is responsible for the students feeling better about themselves.

Counseling and Discussion Groups

Darrigrand and Gum describe a program in "developmental guidance" that produced significant improvement in the self-concepts of second- and third-graders on the Sears Self Concept Instrument. The program included fifteen counselor-led discussion sessions that centered around such topics as

- building wholesome attitudes toward oneself
- learning to get along with age mates
- developing fundamental skills in reading, writing, and calculating
- learning physical skills

The program emphasized sharing feelings with others through pantomime and picture drawing, and being aware of and demonstrating one's own special talents. The counselor fostered an open atmosphere and provided students with a lot of positive feedback.

Significant increases in self-concepts of third-grade students were found following a program of teacher-led "Glasser Discussions." Fletcher explained that the reason for using this sort of group counseling was the belief that self-understanding ultimately results in a more favorable self-concept and improved school achievement.

Glasser himself explained that the core of these discussions (which he called merely "class meetings") is the nonjudgmental attitude of the leader. Topics of discussion included such things as the social behavior of those in the class, friendship, loneliness, vocational choice, or topics suggested by students. Glasser stressed that the discussions were to be open-ended with no suggestion of right or wrong answers. To make real gains in self-concept, students must believe that the discussion is worthwhile, that others are listening to them, and that everyone gets an opportunity to participate. Glasser contended that the efficacy of these meetings is based on the idea that "when a child can speak satisfactorily for himself, he gains a confidence that is hard to shake."

A promising program built on a philosophy similar to that of Glasser's is the Human Development Program. Uvaldo Palomares, Geraldine Ball, and Harold Bessell devised this program to help build students' awareness and respect for themselves and others. The program, called "the Magic Circle" for elementary students and "Innerchange" for high school students, involves a detailed set of communication activities practiced daily by participants. The emphasis in these exercises is encouraging participants to share experiences and feelings and to listen carefully and reflect to each other what they have heard.

For elementary students, topics discussed include such things as "Something I Did That I'm Proud of" and "Something I Do Well." For high school students, topics include career education, multicultural understanding, and crime and drug abuse prevention. According to a publication from the Human Development Training Institute, "Leaders, parents, and circle participants themselves, have observed the increased understanding and appreciation participants have gained for

themselves and others."

One of the most useful collections of practical exercises teachers can use to improve student self-concept has been compiled by Canfield and Wells. Writing in a clear and lively style, the authors provide one hundred suggestions gathered from many different sources. They recommend that administrators encourage teachers to set aside ten to twenty minutes every day or every other day for completing the exercises in the book. One typical exercise is the "autobiographical questionnaire," a list of twenty questions designed to help students become aware of their own unique identities. The questionnaire asks students, "What is there about you that makes your friends like you?" and asks them to "list ten words that describe you." In another exercise called "success sharing," small groups of students share an accomplishment or achievement they had before age ten, one from between age ten to fifteen, and another from age fifteen to the present. Canfield and Wells also suggest significant events and successes that might be included on a personal coat of arms.

Carmichael and her associates briefly describe results of using the "First Things" program with primary students. This packaged program uses filmstrips, cassettes, activities, discussion, and sociodrama to "help each child grow in understanding of self and others." The authors sent a questionnaire to a total of 116 teachers, counselors, administrators, student teachers, and aides who had used the program through the Indiana Career Resource Center. Seventy-seven percent indicated that, as a result of using the program, "student development of positive attitudes toward self" was good or excellent.

Pardew and Schilson report on a similar program used over an eleven-week period with fifty-two four-year-olds. On the Thomas Self-Concept Values Test, the Developmental Profile, and the Questionnaire of Child Character, results were gains in self-concept significantly larger than those of a control group. Pardew and Schilson describe in detail activities used in the program, most of them adapted from published developmental guidance programs such as Don Dinkmeyer's "Developing an Understanding of Self and Others"

(DUSO) program.

Activities include storytelling by the teacher followed by a discussion with children. One typical story centers around a red and white bird who wanted to be a blue bird but ultimately learned to accept himself as he was. Another focused on different ways of learning and how older children do not always know more than younger children in every area. Pardew and Schilson warn that such activities require care in selection so that they are relevant and presented in a logical order over time.

Inservice Programs

Many programs for raising self-concept are of special interest to administrators because they are in a form that can be used for teachers' inservice training or staff development. Brown and MacDougall describe such a program presented to teachers in an urban elementary school in Virginia. Six two-hour sessions focused on such things as self-perceptions and how they are learned, adult interactions with children, and videotape analysis of the teaching behavior of participants. In addition, teachers were asked to use techniques to improve the efficacy of their teaching as revealed by the research of Rosenshine and Furst. These researchers found that effective teachers use such techniques as clarity of presentation, wide variety of instructional procedures, enthusiasm, and use of student ideas.

Brown and MacDougall, measuring students' self-concepts on the Self-Perceptions Index of their Personal Competence Inventory, found significant gains in the self-concepts of students in grades three and four and no significant gains in grades five and six. The authors hypothesized that older students, having more completely developed self-concepts, may be less easily influenced. Although this theory is logical, it is dubious in the light of many other programs that successfully improve self-concepts of students older than fourth graders. Nevertheless, the program produced enough significant changes to be worthy of further exploration.

Creating a more supportive classroom climate was the

focus of an inservice program for third-, sixth-, and eighth-grade teachers. As described by Lynch and Barnette, this program utilized discussion sessions about creating supportive classroom climates. After teachers viewed a videotape of their own classroom behavior, they attempted to change this behavior to include the use of more learner-supportive and learner-acceptant statements and less reproving statements.

The staff of the program created their own instrument, the University Scale, to measure student self-concept before and after the program. Although self-concept did rise "substantially," the change was not statistically significant. Lynch and Barnette feel that even this change is enough to prove the value of the program since most studies reveal that (without special programs aimed at self-concept) student self-concept goes down over the school year. And indeed, self-concept of comparison groups in the same school at the same time did go down.

Teaching students and teachers the principles of "self rewarding" behavior was the theme of a twelve-week program in self-concept enhancement described by Felker, Stanwyck, and Kay. This program began with a teacher workshop session focusing on the five principles of self-rewarding behavior:

- praise yourselves when appropriate
- help children evaluate themselves realistically
- teach children to set reasonable goals
- teach children to praise themselves
- teach children to praise others

The participants were instructed in self-concept enhancement techniques, including how to teach the self-rewarding principles to student tutors and how to lead students in classroom games enhancing self-concept. Teachers then tried the principles and techniques in their classrooms and returned for another workshop. The program produced moderate gains in student self-concept and was enthusiastically received by teachers.

DROPOUTS, DELINQUENTS, AND DISADVANTAGED

All students can benefit from self-concept enhancement programs, but some students appear to be in special need of them. Disadvantaged students, potential delinquents or dropouts, minority students, and bilingual students may wrestle with special self-concept problems. Many programs aim especially at improving the self-concepts of such students.

Students with Special Problems

"Teachers who have positive, reasonable expectations for students will have successful students" was the philosophy of the Focus program as reported by the Roseville Area School District 623 in Roseville, Minnesota. This program aimed at improving academic achievement and self-concept of potential dropouts. Potential dropouts were identified as students who

- cannot function properly in a traditional setting
- perform academically below ability
- have a poor self-image

The program was structured around the "Family Group" consisting of eight to ten students and one teacher who met for one class period every day. Here teachers attempted through discussions to communicate respect and acceptance of all students but rejection of destructive social behavior. Teachers stressed too that each student must be responsible for his or her own individual behavior.

The academic component of the program emphasized individualized instruction in each subject area, goal-setting by students, and tutoring of poorer students by better students.

The program produced significant gains in self-concept on the IOX Self Appraisal Inventory and the MMPI Ego Strength Scale. Significant gains in grade point average were

also achieved.

The Curtailment of Dropouts (C.O.D.) Program served 109 students at the Cooley Education and Vocational Guidance Center in Chicago. This program for potential dropouts aimed at raising self-concepts to prevent students from dropping out.

Bennett reports that, in C.O.D., self-concept enhancement activities centered on group discussions in which students attempted common problem-solving, discussed decision-making techniques, expressed their values and beliefs, and tried to learn more about each other.

To help students get in touch with their own values, instructors used a continuum line technique. To make students' self-concepts explicit, a line was drawn on the floor representing some area of accomplishment such as academic achievement. One end of the line represented the highest achievement possible while the other represented no achievement at all. Students were asked to place themselves where they felt they belonged on the line. Then they were asked to stand where they thought their parents would place them and finally at the spot classmates would place them.

Bennett notes that the keystone of the program was good listening and unconditional acceptance by the teacher. The program produced significant gains on the How-I-See-Myself Scale as well as a significant rise in achievement grades, conduct grades, and attendance.

Students with a history of truancy and delinquency attended the "Office of Probation—Richmond College Reading Center" in Staten Island, New York. Open from 3:30 to 8:30 p.m., the center focused on improvement of self-concept through individual tutoring in reading. Brown reports that results were growth in reading markedly above the national average rate and improved student self-concept as reported by tutors. In addition, 47 percent of students felt they had made a lot of progress toward becoming "the person they want to be" and 40 percent felt they had made some progress.

There is some disagreement about whether disadvantaged students have a lower self-concept than students of high socio-

economic status. Bennett is one of many authors who report that most research on the self-concept of disadvantaged children reveals that they have a poor self-concept. Yet a few researchers have found just the opposite: disadvantaged students have on the whole a more positive self-concept than other students have. It is possible that the inconsistency might be explained by the fact that these researchers are using different instruments. While disadvantaged students may see themselves as competent in such things as making friends, physical prowess, or basic survival skills, they may see themselves as less competent in academic areas. Since some tests of self-concept concentrate primarily on self-concept as a learner, while others measure a broader, multifaceted self-concept, different instruments could produce very different results. Unfortunately, most reports of studies do not include copies of the instrument so specific comparisons cannot be made.

Programs for Minority Students

Most programs for disadvantaged students focus on minority or bilingual students. Bennett summarizes Erikson's explanation of why black students have special problems with self-concept:

> Erik H. Erikson envisioned that the individual [black] student, belonging to an oppressed and exploited minority, which is aware of the dominant cultural ideals, but prevented from emulating them, is apt to fuse negative images held up to him by the dominant majority with his own negative identity.

Accordingly, Bennett continues, a negative self-image begins early for black students. The same problems are faced by Chicano and Latin American students. Racism in this country continues to have pernicious effects on the self-images of minority students. This is especially true when subconscious racism causes teachers to have poor opinions and lowered expectations of minority students.

In Atlanta, soon after desegregation efforts, educators realized that previous racial isolation had caused severe academic deficiencies in minority students. Henning reports that

students with the greatest deficiencies were selected for participation in a program that utilized

- individualized and small-group instruction
- team teachers assisted by aides
- high interest, low difficulty multimedia materials

Although the program aimed solely at improving achievement, significant self-concept gains were registered on the Self Appraisal Inventory. Students also gained three times as much in reading achievement as did those not in the program. This program suggests that significant gains in self-concept can be produced by concentration on academic areas alone. Henning felt that the program's success depended heavily on the "enthusiasm, dedication, and competence of the staff."

An Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) grant financed the program, which cost a total of $866,000 for forty-seven schools or $281.40 per pupil per year.

Bewley describes a Waco (Texas) program to improve the self-concepts of black elementary students with low self-esteem. Teachers and principals identified fifty-one second- and third-grade students with low self-concepts. These students participated in thirty-minute group counseling sessions once a week. Sessions included play-therapy techniques and discussion activities that emphasized self-awareness and group dynamics. At the close of the program, moderate increases in self-esteem were recorded on the California Test of Personality and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory.

An exhaustive guide to materials and resources relating to raising self-concepts of migrant students has been compiled by MACRO Educational Associates. A review of relevant research is provided, as well as a 284-item bibliography. In addition, a lengthy list of specific techniques for improving self-concepts of migrant children is especially helpful for teachers. The authors include such recommendations as using migrant children as resource persons for questions about their particular experiences. They suggest discussions about cultural and life-style differences to communicate the idea that differences do not mean inferiority. They recommend classroom

displays centering around famous American minority persons and a bulletin board for boy or girl of the week.

Programs for Bilingual Students

Students who do not speak or write fluent English but who must nevertheless do all their schoolwork in English have several problems with self-concept. One is that by doing all their school work in an unfamiliar language, they move ahead more slowly and feel less competent than other children. Another is that the school is giving them an implicit message that their language and culture are inferior. Since non-English-speaking students need opportunities to improve their English as well as to receive instruction in their native language, programs using both languages have been found to be effective for them. These bilingual programs often improve achievement as well as raising self-concept.

In the San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District's Bilingual Education Program a staff of bilingual teachers and aides taught classes in both English and Spanish for 717 students in grades one through six. Harrison reports that a community advisory board provided suggestions concerning many aspects of the program, including evaluation and curriculum revision. Twenty-three sessions of inservice training were provided on such topics as using Spanish as a medium of instruction, testing for language dominance, and using techniques for developing oral language proficiency.

At the start of the program, medians in reading, language, and math ranged from the tenth to the thirty-third percentile. After five years they were up to the national average. On the Conoly-Harrison Projected Self Concept Inventory (a bilingual instrument), 40 percent of students showed significant gains in self-concept.

Replacing a negative self-image with ethnic pride was one aim of the Bilingual/Bicultural Education Program in the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Public Schools. This program "emphasized Latin American history and Spanish cultural contributions to contemporary life." Bilingual teachers of Latin heritage taught all subjects in both Spanish and English. In addi-

tion, Mexican and Puerto Rican holidays were celebrated, and Hispanic music, foods, dress, arts, crafts, and customs were emphasized.

After five years, all students were performing academically at grade level except third graders who were learning to read a second language. Other results, though largely anecdotal, were quite positive. Students, parents, community, and staff expressed strong support of the bicultural studies component as a strengthener of self-image. The program has been extended to twelve schools in Milwaukee, and ESEA federal support has continued because the program has been considered exemplary. Pr[illegible]m personnel reported an increase in the proportion of S[illegible]named students who remained in school until gra[illegible]ol Attitude Questionnaire indicated th[illegible] attitudes toward school, and 85 percen[illegible]sponding to a questionnaire indicated they felt the program helped students to feel proud of their heritage.

Offenberg and his colleagues cite evidence that the self-concept of Puerto Rican students is probably lower than that of either black or white students. They describe an attempt to raise self-concepts of Puerto Rican children in the form of the "Let's Be Amigos" Program. This program had two components, the "Arriba Program," which served Puerto Rican students newly arrived to the mainland, and "Model A," a program serving both Anglo and Puerto Rican students in grades K-5.

Both programs were bilingual and included original curricular materials on Hispanic history and culture developed by program leaders. In the Arriba component, five hundred students each year in grades three through twelve studied four major subjects in Spanish, as well as studying English as a second language. In the Model A Program, over a thousand students each year worked with teams of both English-dominant and Spanish-dominant teachers. Up to grade three, students received one hour per day instruction in a second language, and in grades three through five each day was divided equally between both languages.

To measure results, a Spanish translation of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory was devised. Scores showed a significant gain in self-esteem that was higher than for those in English-as-a-Second-Language programs. Cost of the program, partially financed through Title VII, was about $300 per pupil per year, including teacher salaries.

TEACHER ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

> You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.
>
> G.B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*,
> quoted by Rosenthal and Jacobson

In spite of the success of self-concept improvement programs, a nagging question remains: Why do they work? Of course, no one really knows the answer, but it seems likely that the answer may revolve around something beyond group discussion techniques or bilingual or remedial reading programs. The answer may have something to do with teacher attitudes.

It has already been noted that the evaluations of others have been found to have profound effects on self-esteem. Quandt points out that although a sense of one's competencies can be learned by trial and error, self-value seems to come principally from the opinions and evaluations of other people.

Next to parents, teachers probably have the most pervasive effect on children's self-concepts, especially on their beliefs about their own academic abilities. Some evidence for this can be found in research indicating that teacher attitudes about student abilities have strong effects on student performance. To corroborate this, Purkey cited a six-year study by Brookover, Erickson, and Joiner that concluded, "When the teacher believes that his students can achieve, the students appear to be more successful; when the teacher believes that the students cannot achieve, then it influences their performance negatively." Kash, Borich, and Fenton put it in terms of teacher expectations: "Pupils who perceive the teacher's

expectations as too low or unchallenging may respond with just enough effort to meet the low expectations, depressing their performance in response to feelings of personal devaluation."

Richmond and White found that "there is considerable evidence that pupils who are described unfavorably by their teachers tend to describe themselves unfavorably, to be aware of their teachers' poor opinion of them, and to receive lower grades than do the pupils whom the teacher describes favorably."

The most striking evidence appeared in Rosenthal and Jacobson's classic study of the "pygmalion effect." These authors conducted an experiment in which they gave teachers the names of "special children" whose performance on a previous test had supposedly indicated that they were about to "bloom intellectually" or to show a spurt of growth in IQ. At the end of the year, these children, who had in fact been chosen randomly, did show growth in IQ significantly greater than those in a control group. The authors concluded that this effect could only be the result of the teachers' belief that the students would gain.

Indeed, Rosenthal had already found in an earlier study that when examiners were interacting with students alleged to be earning higher grades, they behaved in a more friendly, likeable, interested, encouraging manner. Likely, teacher behavior toward the "special children" in the later experiment changed in these same kinds of ways.

Rosenthal and Jacobson felt that this kind of effect of the attitudes of teachers could confound the results of almost any experimental program; it seems likely that teacher attitudes would have even stronger effects on programs designed to raise student self-concept.

How can teachers communicate attitudes that nourish positive self-concept? Several authors have suggested ways teachers can convey to students that they value them and have faith in their abilities. Coopersmith and Silverman believe teachers must strive to be interested in each child and concerned about him or her as an individual. They urge

teachers to provide a warm supportive climate, to genuinely accept children, and to communicate that they sincerely care about each child.

Purkey suggests several ways teachers can communicate an attitude of respect and warmth to students. Teachers should

- learn the name of each student as soon as possible and use the name often
- share feelings with students
- always be as courteous with students as with adults
- arrange some time for quietly talking alone with each student
- notice and comment favorably on the things that are important to students

Quandt warns against using embarrassment as a method of punishment since this crushes self-concept. He recommends correcting behavior by condemning the specific act rather than the child. Glasser echoes the opinions of many other authors cited in these pages when he states that the cornerstone of his previously described techniques to improve self-concept is a nonjudgmental, accepting attitude by teachers. Like Quandt, he emphasizes the necessity for rejecting undesirable behavior while at the same time accepting the child.

Good Teacher Self-Concepts

Not only are teacher beliefs about students related to student self-concepts and ultimately student achievement, but also teacher self-concepts appear to be related to student self-concepts and therefore ultimately to student achievement.

Edeburn and Landry, using the Self Appraisal Inventory and the Index of Adjustment of Values, found that student and teacher self-concepts were closely correlated. Curtis and Altman, surveying 755 fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students and their teachers by using the Tennessee Self Concept Scale and the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory, found that teachers with high self-concepts tended to have students with

high self-concepts. Furthermore, Aspy and Buhler, using trained observers and Fiedler's Q-Sort to evaluate the self-concepts of six third-grade teachers, found that, over the school year, students who gained the most in achievement scores had teachers with high self-concepts.

Of course, no cause and effect relationship can be inferred from these correlations. No one knows whether high teacher self-concepts cause students to have higher self-concepts or whether it is the self-concepts of the students that affect the teachers. Aspy and Buhler warned in the report described above that teachers might have high self-concepts because they are more knowledgeable and thus promote high achievement gains in their students because they are more effective teachers.

In spite of the impossibility of proving conclusively from the research cited above that self-confident teachers produce self-confident students, many authors believe this is so. Purkey maintains "there seems to be general agreement that the teacher needs to have positive and realistic attitudes about himself and his abilities before he is able to reach out to like and respect others."

Kash, Borish, and Fenton note that a study by Combs and Soper found that self-confident teachers actually exhibited classroom behavior that fostered a positive self-image in pupils.

Coopersmith, in his landmark study, found that parents of children with high self-concepts are themselves active, poised, and self-assured and feel capable of handling child rearing. It seems likely that these parents had a stronger effect on their children's self-concepts than the children did on their parents' self-concepts. And thus it seems equally likely that self-confident teachers can create more self-confident students.

Improving Teacher Self-Concept

If teachers with positive self-concepts tend to have students with high self-concepts and high achievement, it seems logical that improving self-concepts of teachers might be a

good way to attempt to increase self-confidence and achievement of students. Yet programs to improve the self-concepts of teachers are rare.

In one such program, thirty hours of human relations training were offered to twenty-five intern teachers as a way of improving their self-concepts. The training, as described in detail by Acklen, included theoretical instruction as well as skill development in human relations with an emphasis on expressing empathy, respect, and warmth. Techniques used in the sessions included such things as small-group exercises, videotaping, audiotaping, and role playing. After the training, participants showed significantly greater gains on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale than did those not participating. Acklen concluded that human relations training should be included in the inservice program for all teachers now working with children.

In another study that is of interest, though quite inconclusive, Hannum, Thoresen, and Hubbard tried to raise two teachers' self-acceptance by changing "evaluative self thoughts." Evaluative self-thoughts are merely the thoughts the teachers had about their own worth and capabilities. The experimenters taught teachers a "thought stopping" technique that required them to say to themselves the word "stop" whenever they were aware of negative self-thoughts and to immediately begin thinking about something else. In addition, stimulus cues (like a small, colored decal) were placed around the room to stimulate positive self-thoughts each time they were noticed by the teacher. One teacher, after counting positive and negative self-thoughts with a wrist counter, found that positive self-thoughts increased significantly, while negative thoughts went down. At the same time, an observer reported that this teacher's negative responses to students (such as criticism or scolding) decreased significantly. The other teacher also decreased negative responses to students and negative self-thoughts but, inexplicably, decreased positive self-thoughts as well. Although the results of this program are difficult to evaluate, they seem promising enough to warrant further experimentation.

Schmuck has recommended several techniques facilitators might use to "decrease teacher feelings of inferiority." He suggests encouraging teachers

- to set realistic goals
- to specify goals in clear behavioral language
- to share goals with each other
- to challenge each other's unrealistic goals

He also suggests a "strength" exercise in which each teacher is instructed to think about his or her own strengths and the strengths of others in the group and discuss them.

These techniques and ideas are only preliminary sketches of the kinds of things that might be tried to improve teacher self-concept. Few have given much thought or energy to this goal. Whether improving teacher self-concept is the most effective technique for improving student self-concept remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

Research over the last ten years provides overwhelming evidence that the most successful students have strong positive self-concepts. This positive self-concept is not the same as conceit or even pride. When students have high self-concepts it doesn't mean they feel superior or are content to rest on their laurels. It does mean they feel confident about their abilities to learn and grow and reach the goals they set for themselves.

Whether this kind of self-confidence precedes achievement or is a product of it no one really knows. At any rate, over the last few years, educators have begun to feel that a good student self-concept is important as an end in itself, a necessary component of true maturity and self-actualization.

Many programs appear to have had good success with raising student self-concept for the average middle-class student, for the disadvantaged, and for those whose self-concept has been damaged by racism and cultural bias. These programs produced significant gains on tests of students' self-concepts and were heralded enthusiastically by participants. Many showed significant achievement gains too.

Yet no one knows how these programs work, why they work, or, in the strictest sense, *if* they work, since measurement of self-concept gains ultimately is almost entirely subjective.

The best guess is that the self-concepts of students are strongly dependent on the attitudes of teachers. When teachers accept students, value them, praise them, and help them to see their strong points, students begin to accept and value themselves. In so far as self-concept enhancement programs influence teachers toward more accepting attitudes, they are effective. If these programs encourage teachers to focus their concentration and energies toward improving rather than tearing down the self-concepts of students, then they have accomplished a lot.

Research suggests that the task of administrators must be to foster positive attitudes in teachers in two ways. The first is by strengthening teachers' own self-concepts and helping them to feel capable of helping children to learn and grow. The second is to help teachers understand the effect they can have on the self-concepts of students. Teachers must realize that they have the potential for doing both good and harm to students' self-concepts. Purkey was aware of this potential when he quoted from Abraham Maslow's *Motivation and Personality:*

> Let people realize clearly that every time they threaten someone or humiliate or hurt unnecessarily or dominate or reject another human being, they become forces for the creation of psychopathology, even if these be small forces. Let them recognize that every man who is kind, helpful, decent, psychologically democratic, affectionate and warm, is a psychotherapeutic force even though a small one.

Perhaps this quote should be posted on every classroom wall.

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Interview

Gary, Ted, principal, Hazel Valley Elementary School, Seattle, Washington. Telephone interview, June 12, 1978.